

Strikers defy Kremlin as Soviet protests spread

MOSCOW, Apr 12: Thousands of industrial workers in the Byelorussian capital of Minsk, once a Communist Party stronghold, stayed away from work in a second day of strikes, reports Reuters.

Strike committees have been set up at 82 city enterprises to coordinate the protest as workers demand the resignation of President Mikhail Gorbachev and the local government, as well as new elections to the Soviet Parliament, Tass News Agency said.

Tass said strike leaders were calling for a republic-wide general strike, and for the Interior Ministry troops were standing by.

A spokesman for the workers' movement said more than 50,000 workers were on strike and had taken to the streets.

Workers in the central Lenin Square were demanding the election of party cells from all state structures, including the police and KGB, in the republic, and nationalisation of vast communist holdings.

The crisis — in what was seen as a "safe" ground for a Gorbachev visit in late February — sent local communists scrambling into emergency session after workers rejected a generous economic package and stuck to their political demands.

In the volatile Southern Republic of Georgia, protest strikes called by the nationalist leadership to force the removal of Kremlin troops from a disputed northern corner be-

gan to ripple through the railways and ports.

And militant miners, the core of the increasingly assertive independent labour movement, kept up their six-week political strike, bringing the fragile metallurgy and chemical industries to the edge of collapse.

Mines were idle from the Polish border to the big Kuzbass coalfields in Western Siberia, where official estimates put total losses for April alone at 1.6 million tonnes of coal.

In Kazakhstan, 400 delegates representing 200,000 mine workers formed a new independent miners union.

But there were signs amid the growing labour unrest of a possible move toward compromise by Gorbachev.



A buyer looks on to buy a deep freeze from the posh electronic market at Dhaka Stadium. Freeze has of late become an item of Eid shopping just before the Eid-ul-Fitr. — Star photo

Japan may ease ban on imported rice

TOKYO, Apr 12: Japan is showing signs it may be ready to ease its long standing ban on imported rice in the face of tough US pressure. But the question is when and by how much, Japanese analysts said, reports Reuters.

"Japan won't give in until other participants make the same kind of concessions due to pressure from the powerful farm lobby", political analyst Fumio Kubo said.

"But July, when the summit meeting of the seven developed countries is expected, may be a key date." The group of seven comprises the United States, Canada, Germany, France, Japan, Italy and Britain.

Japan, which consumes about 10 million tonnes of rice a year, has a cast-iron ban on importing rice and subsidises rice farmers, arguing the country must be self-sufficient in the staple for national security reasons.

"Our basic policy remains unchanged", a senior Japanese official told a news briefing after the Japan-US summit in the United States last week.

He did not rule out a partial easing of the rice ban if progress could be achieved with the United States and the European Community at the

next session of the Uruguay Round of talks under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

Japan's ban on imported rice and its refusal to allow even minimal market access were running up against a deepening international desire for free farm trade, analysts said.

At the summit with US President George Bush last week, Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu made no bold promises to liberalise the tightly guarded rice sector, but agreed to raise the issue under the current GATT talks despite strong domestic opposition.

"The Prime Minister said while rice was a difficult domestic problem involving subsidies and price controls, he wanted to solve it at the Uruguay Round and in close cooperation with the United States", the Japanese official said at the briefing.

Bush told reporters he had asked Kaifu to open Japan's doors to US rice.

"I told him we would like to have access to the Japanese rice market," Bush said. "The overriding point is we both realise we must have a successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round."

State of Soviet agriculture alarming

BRUSSELS, Apr 12: A senior Soviet grain buyer on Thursday described the state of agriculture in the Soviet Union as alarming and appealed for long term credits from the European Community and other suppliers to finance grain imports, reports Reuters.

Mikhail Ageev, the Deputy Director of the Soviet Grain Buying Agency, said disarray in the countryside meant that Moscow was unlikely to match the bumper crop of 236 million tonnes harvested last year even if weather was good.

"Therefore we shall need large imports", he told a conference of the EC's grain trade lobby. "However, the level of imports will not depend so much on our requirements as on the availability of long term credits, and in this respect the EC will be very vital for us", he said.

"The situation on the eve of spring sowings is alarming", he said. Deliveries of tractors and machinery had fallen 65 per cent below the required level and there were acute shortages of spare parts, fuel and lubricants.

Purchases of meat, milk and poultry had fallen by 13 per cent in January and February. Land reform was proceeding slowly.

Sharp rise in prices of Eid items

Star Economic Report

City markets and makeshift shops on the footpaths are crowded with shoppers as the Eid-ul-Fitr, the biggest festival of Muslims, is approaching.

Markets are remaining open late into the night and shopkeepers are becoming increasingly busy catering to the demands of the shoppers.

Though there is abundant supply of goods in the markets Prices of some items have increased abnormally.

The prices of clothes and shoes have shot up by 10 to 25 per cent over the prices last year during the same period.

Price of some items which are used in making various sweetmeats to entertain guests on the Eid day has registered a remarkable rise.

"Sima", the most common item used to entertain the guests on Eid day, is selling at Taka 17 to 19 a kg. A better quality of sima, is selling at Taka 32. 'lachcha sima', which can be served only adding milk, is selling at Taka 50 to 55 a kg. A quarter kg packet of Alauddin 'lachcha sima' is selling at Taka 10 to 11.

Most striking rise in price

ago it how sold at Taka 11 to 12.

The prices of 'jira' have also risen. A kg of 'jira' now sells at Taka 128 to 132. Two weeks ago it sold between Taka 115 and 118. Price of soybean oil and sugar, however, shows downward trend.

The government have lowered the price of sugar from Taka 27.32 a kg to Taka 25 at godown level. In retail markets a kg of sugar is now selling between Taka 27 and Taka 28. Price of soybean oil has come down to Taka 32 from Taka 35 two weeks ago.

Shopkeepers say prices of 'sima', butter oil and spices like 'elach' and 'kismis' and 'polao' rice may rise further as sale of these items get momentum a day or two before the Eid.

G-7 meet in London next week

TOKYO, Apr 12: Japan's Finance Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto said today that currency and interest rates would unlikely be on the main agenda at a planned meeting of top finance officials from the Group of Seven (G-7) in London next week, reports AFP.

Hashimoto told reporters that the two issues would not be a major issue in the absence of the G-7 central bankers at the inauguration of the European Bank for Development and Reconstruction (EBRD).

He said the London G-7 meeting would focus on economic reforms in central and eastern Europe, economic assistance to the Soviet Union, and the cost of reconstruction after the Gulf war.

Referring to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Japan next week, Hashimoto said there could be Japanese financial assistance to the Soviet Union if the Soviets return to Japan the four Soviet-held Northern islands off Hokkaido.

Hashimoto will leave here for London tomorrow.

Snippets

Kurdish refugees need 700 tons food a day

PARIS, Apr 12: The medical relief organisation, Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) estimated on Thursday that Kurdish refugees on the Iranian and Turkish frontiers need at least 700 tons of food a day, reports Reuters.

In a statement in Paris, it said refugees on the Iranian border needed 450 tons a day, and those on the Turkish border 250 tons a day.

MSF is one of a number of international aid agencies bringing emergency relief to several hundred thousand Kurds who fled their homes in Iraq in fear of a massacre after Baghdad quashed a Kurdish rebellion. It gave no estimate of the number of Kurds without food or shelter on the two borders and no explanation of how it calculated its food-aid estimates.

Strike leaders begin talks with govt

MINSK, Apr 12: Strike leaders on Friday began negotiations with the Byelorussian government, but warned they would call a republic-wide general strike if worker grievances are not resolved within 10 days, reports AP.

Talks began at 10 am (0700 GMT) — one day after a one and a half day work stoppage crippled factories in the republic capital of Minsk to the point where the government agreed to negotiate, strike committee spokesman Vladimir Gvozdek said.

"If the negotiations fail, a general, political strike is to be called throughout the republic on April 23," Alexander Galkevich, chief of the strike committee's news service, told the independent Interfax news agency.

Asian Dollar deposit rates close mixed

SINGAPORE, Apr 12: Asian Dollar deposit rates closed mixed in Lacustrine trade ahead of tonight's 1230 GMT issue of US March Consumer Price Index, dealers said, reports Reuters.

Market rates were slightly easier. People are still thinking of lower US CPI figures which might force the Fed to reduce the (US) discount rate, one dealer said.

In day-to-day rates, week-end closed 1/16 percentage point higher at 6-1/16 5-15/16 per cent against Thursday's 6-5/8 while week-fixed eased 1/16 point to 6-1/16 5-15/16 against 6-1/8 6 per cent. Monday's Tuesday was unchanged at 65-7/8.

Dollar closes lower in Tokyo

TOKYO, Apr 12: The Dollar closed lower at 135.85 Yen on the Tokyo foreign exchange market Friday, down 0.80 Yen from Thursday's finish of 136.65 Yen, reports AFP.

After opening at 135.85 Yen, the Dollar moved between 135.70 Yen and 136.04 Yen, against Thursday's range of 136.05 Yen to 137.27 Yen.

The central trading rate dropped from Thursday's 136.80 Yen to 135. Spot turnover shrank from 10.13 billion Dollars to 4.76 billion Dollars.

One-month forward rates went down from Thursday's 136.883 Yen to 136.085 Yen at the close, while three-month rates sagged from 137.24 Yen to 136.45 Yen.

Capital shortage must be dealt with

TOKYO, Apr 12: World financial institutions must deal with the international shortage of capital created by the huge gap between savings and demand for funds, a Japanese Finance Ministry spokesman said Wednesday, reports AFP.

Japan, a wealthy country endowed with surpluses, wants to share its burden as the world's biggest lender. Tokyo has warned for several weeks that industrialised countries are having trouble meeting the demand for funds from developing countries, Eastern Europe and the Gulf.

In the bid to overcome the shortage of liquid assets, "the multilateral financial institutions like IMF (International Monetary Fund), World Bank or others will have to take the leading role," Makoto Utsumi, Vice Minister of Finance for International Affairs, told a seminar on capital flow.

Jewellery worth \$10m robbed in HK

HONG KONG, Apr 12: Four armed robbers fled with jewellery worth 10 million Hong Kong Dollars (1.3 million US Dollars) Thursday after a raid on a jewellery shop here, police said, reports AFP.

The four, three of them masked, used a pistol to threaten employees at the regent hotel shop in Hong Kong's popular Tsimshatsui tourist area before fleeing in a stolen car, police said.

Market Prices of Listed Shares and Debentures with Dhaka Stock Exchange

At the close of trading on April 4 and April 11, 1991.

Company	EV/ML*	1990-91			
		April 4	April 11	High	Low
		Taka	Taka	Taka	Taka
BANKS (Ten)					
AL Baraka Bank	1000/1	995.00	995.00	1135.00	960.00
AB Bank	100/5	150.00	150.00	255.00	135.00
City Bank	100/5	250.00	270.00	255.00	180.00
IFLC	100/5	202.00	200.00	235.00	140.00
Islami Bank	1000/1	1150.00	1150.00	1150.00	925.00
National Bank	100/5	118.00	118.00	145.00	102.00
Papali Bank	100/5	1110.00	110.00	115.00	90.00
Rupali Bank	100/10	93.00	95.00	130.00	75.00
U.C.B.L	100/5	130.00	130.00	155.00	130.00
Utara Bank	100/5	210.00	210.00	240.00	193.00
INVESTMENT (Eight)					
LCB	100/5	97.00	97.00	117.50	90.00
1st ICB M.Fund	100/5	435.00	435.00	575.00	405.00
2nd ICB Fund	100/5	198.00	198.00	220.00	170.00
3rd ICB Fund	100/5	155.00	155.00	173.00	143.00
4th ICB M.Fund	100/10	146.00	146.75	161.00	133.00
5th ICB M.Fund	100/10	125.00	125.00	142.00	115.00
6th ICB M.Fund	100/10	94.00	95.00	104.00	85.00
ICB Unit Cert.					
Sales Price		127.00	127.00		
Re-purchase		122.00	122.00		
INSURANCE (Four)					
BGC	100/10	114.00	114.00	117.50	104.00
Green Delta	100/10	115.5	115.00	122.00	104.50
Peoples	100/10	120.00AL	120.00AL	118.00	108.00
United	100/10	116.00AL	116.00AL	120.00	105.00
ENGINEERING (Nineteen)					
Afub Automobiles	100/5	210.00	213.00	232.00	194.00
Atlas Bangladesh	1050	43.00	44.00	48.00	35.50
Aziz Pipes	100/5	232.00	232.00	250.00	180.00
Bangladesh Autocars	100/5	114.00	114.00	157.00	113.00
Bangladesh Lamps	100/5	280.00	290.00	365.00	230.00
B.Thal Aluminium	100/10	96.00AL	97.00AL	110.00	75.00
Bangladesh Carbide	100/5	400.00	400.00	450.00	320.00
Bengal Steel	10/50	18.00	18.00		
Eastern Cables	100/5	100.00	105.00	105.00	78.00
Howlader PVC	100/10	120.00	120.00	122.00	103.00
Karim Pipe	100/5	128.00	128.00	1390.00	115.00
Metallex Corp.	100/5	97.00	97.00	113.00	75.00
Monno Staffers	10/5	250.00	250.00	250.00	250.00
Monno Jute	100/5	400.00	400.00		
National Tubes	100/10	137.00	137.00	137.00	102.00
Panther Text	10/50	6.00	6.00		
Quasem Drycoils	10/50	8.80	8.80	9.30	7.25
Renwick Jaineswar	100/5	69.00	70.00	75.00	40.00
Singer Bangladesh	100/5	1150.00	1150.00	1150.00	1150.00
FOOD & ALLIED (Twenty one)					
AB Biscuit	100/5	200.00	200.00	290.00	200.00
Alpha Tobacco	10/50	48.00	48.00	48.00	48.00
Aman Sea Food	100/5	36.00	36.00	40.00	36.00
Apex Food	100/5	340.00	340.00	340.00	280.00
Aroma Tea	100/5	45.00	45.00	52.00	54.00
Bargos	100/5	305.00			
Bengal Food	100/5	206.40	208.00	255.00	170.00
B.L.T.C.	100/5	600.00	600.00	600.00	600.00
B.T.C.	10/50	83.00	83.00	83.00	80.00
Cig. Vegetable	100/5	116.00	116.00	116.00	90.00
Dhaka Vegetable	100/5	159.00	159.00	192.00	152.00
E.L. Cemelita	100/5	700.00	700.00	700.00	500.00
Frogleg Export	10/50	6.00	6.00	8.00	4.00
Gemini Sea Food	100/5	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Modern Industries	100/5	150.00	150.00	135.00	120.00
N.T.C.	100/5	280.00	280.00	350.00	220.00
Rabeya Flour	10/100				
Rupam Oil	10/100	7.50AL	7.10AL	9.25	6.50
Tulip Dairy	100/10	105.00AL	101.00AL	105.00	101.00
Yousuf Flour	10/50	NT	NT		
Zal Bangla	10/50	9.20	9.24	10.00	7.40
FUEL & POWER (Three)					
Piedma Oil Co.	10/50	40.00	40.00	47.00	40.00
Eastern Lubricant	10/50	14.00	14.00		
Oxyzen	10/50	58.00	58.00	90.00	50.00
JUTE (Twelve)					
Abad Jute	100/10	NT	NT		
Anowara Jute	10/50	NT	NT		
Delta Jute	10/50	8.50	8.50		

*Trading was closed on February 21 because of 'Shaheed Day'

Dhaka-Thimpu trade cooperation to grow

The visiting Bhutanese Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering Friday called on Finance and Planning Minister Muhammad Saifur Rahman in Dhaka, reports BSS.

They discussed and exchanged views on different aspects of bilateral issues and matters of common concern, particularly the expansion of trade and commerce between the two countries.

Referring to the long-term development and economic cooperation the Finance and Planning Minister stressed the efforts of collective self reliance among the South Asian countries through the spirit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The Bhutanese Foreign Minister recalled the initiative of formation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) by the late President Ziaur Rahman, a regional forum for cooperation in development efforts of the South Asian regional countries.

They also exchanged views on different Bangladesh products like cloth, paper and paper products, fertilizer, jute and jute goods, ceramic and garments which Bhutan could import from Bangladesh.

The Bhutanese Foreign Minister said the existing friendly relationship between Bhutan and Bangladesh would be further strengthening in the days ahead for the mutual benefit of the two countries.

The Bhutanese Ambassador in Bangladesh, Karma Darjee and senior official were present on the occasion.

EC to compensate energy tax on plants

BRUSSELS, Apr 12: Energy-intensive industries will receive compensation to offset their increased costs if the European Community goes ahead with a mooted energy tax, an EC Commission official said yesterday, reports Reuters.

Jos Delbeke, an economist in the Commission's Environment Division, said the international competitiveness of a limited number of EC industries — such as steel, chemicals and non-ferrous metals — would be hurt by such a tax.

"The Commission has admitted that accompanying measures would have to be designed," he told a business conference on EC environmental policy.

"It's not the commission's intention to create an industrial desert in the community", Delbeke gave no details of the measures but one commission source said corporation taxes could be reduced for companies most affected. The source said the cement industry could qualify for such compensation.

The commission, the EC executive, is considering whether to propose a mix of taxes on energy and Carbon Dioxide (Co2) as part of a package of measures to meet the EC goal of stabilising its Co2 emissions at last year's levels by the year 2000.

"The aim is to produce a comprehensive package of measures by the summer,"

New Zealand PM rules out economic U-turn

WELLINGTON, Apr 12: Prime Minister Jim Bolger yesterday ruled out an economic U-turn despite criticism from within his national party that headline policies are pushing New Zealand deeper into recession, reports Reuters.

Almost all members of the national caucus (parliamentary party) had stood by his plans to tackle a big budget deficit by cutting state spending, including welfare payments, he said.

"The suggestion that there was going to be some dramatic U-turn in the government's economic policy because of unease in the ranks was never a credible scenario," he told a news conference after the caucus debated economic policy.

This month's welfare cuts, which took up to a quarter off unemployment benefits, and government plans to reform labour laws, weakened trade unions, have provoked protest marches and one-day strikes nation wide.

But Bolger has also had to cope with growing criticism from a small but vocal group inside his own party.

Last week former national Prime Minister Sir Robert Muldoon said Finance Minister Ruth Richardson should be replaced unless the policies were quickly changed. Otherwise national faced defeat in the next general election, due in 1993.

Japan's budget for '91-92

TOKYO, Apr 12: Japan's 70.35 trillion yen budget for the year ending March 31, 1992 became law on Thursday despite a rejection by the Upper House of Parliament, reports Reuters.

The opposition-controlled House of Councillors turned down the budget, but it took effect under the constitutional priority given to the Lower House, which voted for the budget on March 14, parliamentary officials said.

Featuring smaller rises in defence spending and overseas aid than in the previous year, the 1991/92 budget is up 6.2 per cent from the initial budget for 1990/91.

Finance Ministry official said the 1991/92 budget is not aimed at stimulating the economy.